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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: STUDENT EXPULSIONS FOLLOW PARTICIPATION IN  
DEMONSTRATIONS

REF: MINSK 336

Classified By: AMBASSADOR GEORGE KROL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: Although the Ministry of Education (MOE) denied reports that students would be expelled for political reasons, approximately 15 students who participated in demonstrations following the March 19 presidential elections have been expelled from Belarusian universities. In a March 22 letter to all state universities, the MOE encouraged university rectors and education department heads to take measures not to allow students to participate in unsanctioned events following the elections. More expulsions are expected to follow, but gradually so as not to rouse further international condemnation. EU countries have pledged to allow students who were expelled from Belarusian universities to study at European universities, although it remains to be seen whether Belarusian students will utilize this opportunity. End Summary.

#### Reports of Expelled Students Trickle In

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12. (C) On April 5, Association of Belarusian Students head Alyona Talapila told Poloff that 15 students have been expelled from Belarusian universities so far. She estimated that about half of the students were expelled from the Belarusian State Pedagogical University, while other students were expelled from the universities in Baranovich, Grodno, and Mogilev. None of the students were expelled officially for political reasons. The universities cited missed classes or poor marks as the reasons for the students' expulsions. Talapila expected more expulsions to occur since 150 activists - mainly students - were released from prison on April 4 and will now be held accountable for their absences. Talapila predicted, however, that the students would not be expelled all at once; instead, the university authorities will gradually dismiss the students.

13. (C) On April 4, Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) Deputy Head Andrey Bastunets told Poloff about four students from Belarusian State Pedagogical University who had recently been expelled. (Note: Since neither Bastunets nor Talapila revealed the names of the expelled students, it is unclear whether these four students were included in Talapila's estimate.) According to the letters they received from the university authorities, the official reason for their expulsion was the violation of internal university

rules and procedures. Bastunets said the students plan to appeal the university's decision, but are not optimistic.

14. (C) On April 5, lawyers for Vyasna human rights NGO Valentin Stephanovich and Ales Belyatsky told Ambassador that they were aware of at least 16 students who were expelled immediately prior to and following the elections. The Vyasna human rights lawyers claimed to be following the situation very carefully and promised to put the information that they receive about expelled students on their website, [www.spring96.org](http://www.spring96.org), by April 7. (Note: As of April 12, no information on expelled students has appeared on Vyasna's website.) Stephanovich and Belyatsky told Ambassador that Vyasna is creating a committee to provide information and advice for the parents of expelled students. Stephanovich and Belyatsky echoed Talapila's prediction that the expulsion process would be gradual, occurring most likely at the end of school terms or via "failures" on exams. Independent news agency Belapan quoted Belyatsky on April 4 saying that several students have also been expelled from Maksim Tank Teacher's Training University in Minsk.

15. (C) On April 4, Poloff met with OSCE representative Fiona Frazer. Frazer predicted that the GOB will punish students, but will resort to tactics other than expulsions - including poor test scores, evictions from dormitories, and deprivation of stipends - to avoid international condemnation. Student magazine "Studencheskaya Dumka" representative Sergey Sakharov told Poloff on April 7 about a medical student who faced punishment for missing classes because she was in prison for participating in the demonstrations following the elections.

GOB Will Not Expel Students for Political Activities...

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16. (C) During a March 30 Belarusian Television (BT) interview, Deputy Education Minister Aleksandr Zhuk expressed the Ministry of Education's (MOE's) concern over some young people's involvement in "political games" but unequivocally declared that "students have never been expelled and will not be expelled for political reasons." Zhuk explained that students are usually expelled for missing classes without valid reason, breaking internal university and dormitory regulations or failing tests. However, he reminded the students that they are legally bound to comply with the universities' internal regulations stated in the universities' charters.

17. (C) Zhuk's interview followed a March 29 announcement from the Ministry of Education's (MOE's) press office, which stated, "nobody is expelling anyone." The press office did promise to investigate every reported violation and to punish students who committed offenses.

...But Doesn't Want Participation in Political Activities

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18. (C) Belarusian Assembly of Democratic NGO's representative Alyona Volyenets passed to Poloff on April 7 a copy of a March 22 letter sent by the MOE to all university rectors and education department directors of all regional executive committees. This letter described additional security measures that the MOE encouraged the universities to undertake to "protect" students and to prevent them from participating in "anti-state activities." The letter claimed that destructive powers were provoking disorder in Minsk. The MOE encouraged addressees "to prevent illegal activities of a political nature" and to "not allow students to travel to the capital to participate in any unsanctioned events." The MOE warned that the universities should strengthen control over students' conduct, especially when they miss class without a valid reason. The letter encouraged the universities to host a cultural or sporting event on the weekend of March 25-26--i.e. the weekend of the opposition's March 25 Freedom Day rally (re ftel)--and to increase activities for students during free

time in the evenings and on weekends.

#### EU Universities Open Doors for Expelled Students

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¶9. (C) Several EU countries have pledged to support Belarusian students who are expelled for political reasons. On March 30 in the presence of Ten Plus Coalition leader and former presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich, Polish Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz and rectors from several Polish universities signed a declaration allowing up to 300 students who are expelled from Belarusian universities to study at Polish universities. The European Humanities University in Vilnius, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Slovakia have also indicated that they are ready to accept expelled Belarusian students.

¶10. (C) On April 12, independent media reported that the first group of Belarusian students who were expelled during and immediately following the presidential elections has expressed interest in continuing their education abroad. Four former students from Belarusian State Pedagogical University, Belarusian State University, and Belarusian State Economic University have completed the necessary documents to study in Poland.

¶11. (C) Talapila, however, reported that the majority of the students with whom she has spoken would prefer to remain in Belarus. She cited ties to organizations, friends and family as well as responsibilities in Belarus as the main reasons for wanting to stay. She suspects that the students will appeal their expulsions, if they can. If they are not successful, they will most likely enroll in other Belarusian universities, if possible - Talapila fears that the universities will create a student black list - or may be forced to pursue distance-learning opportunities.

Comment

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¶12. (C) Post has heard from reliable independent press sources that some of the arrested students who decided to protest did so not because of their political beliefs but because they saw an easy opportunity to obtain a free scholarship to study abroad or acquire political refugee status when abroad. Regardless, threats of international condemnation and the prospect for expelled students to study at foreign universities appear to have tempered the GOB's response to student participation in demonstrations. It is also plausible that by allowing the politically active students to remain in the universities, the regime can more easily monitor the opposition's activities.

Krol